

## A TRUE PROPHET.

## THE PROFESSOR'S ROMANCE.

[London Society.]

Herr Professor Heinrich Bettinger, had dressed himself with more than usual care when he sallied forth one fine April morning, to pay a *Kaffeefahrt* to Frau Mittnacht, who lived in an old-fashioned, rambling, wooden house standing in a large garden on the high road, about a mile from Abnstadt, in South Germany. The Professor was a middle-aged, awkwardly-built man, slightly under middle height and inclined to stoutness; he had high shoulders and a short neck, and he stooped as he walked. His face, spite of his long, shaggy hair, irregular features, wide mouth, and crooked teeth, was by no means devoid of attraction. The forehead, over which the untidy hair fell loosely, was broad and nobly shaped; the blue eyes, which looked out from under his spectacles, were full of gentleness and candor; his expression was benignity itself, and his whole manner unassuming—almost childlike in its simplicity.

The Professor, as we have said, dressed with more than usual care. It was true that his broadcloth suit was ill-made, and that it had worn white at the seams and bright at the elbows; it was true, too, that his wide, flapping, linen collar was frayed at the edges, limp, and innocent of starch, and that his clumsy boots betrayed unskilled workmanship; but he had brushed his clothes—an unwelcome concession to the proprieties—had applied some precision to the lying of his black cravat, which was generally fastened in a loose knot under one ear, and had substituted a soft black felt hat for the sun-scorched straw one, whose dilapidated condition in the region of the brim was palpable even to his short-sighted eyes.

Herr Bettinger trotted briskly down the stone staircase leading from his rooms, which were at the top of a tall corner house in the main street of Abnstadt. As he passed out of the open front door he caught sight of his servant Ricks, a country girl in a non-descript dress of short blue petticoat, colorless loose print jacket, and clattering wooden shoes, who was entering with a pitcher of water poised upon her head. Calling a genial "Pardon" after him, he turned the corner into the Canzlei Strasse—a picturesque, narrow street, with shops and tall, irregular houses, many of them of wood; the character of the street, and the town, was preeminently studious. A public school, a gymnasium, and a music school stood in close proximity to each other in the Canzlei Strasse. Students in eccentric caps and shawls, and with sparingly combed hair, were to be seen, rushing in little companies of twos and threes to keep scholastic appointments at one or other of these institutions. Outside the town was a large, open field, where the sun-burned, fair-haired soldiers, dourly pedants, tastelessly-dressed "housewives"—their everlasting knitting in their hands—nurses, and children were to be seen taking the air at all hours of the day.

The Professor saluted many acquaintances as he hurried along. Students—several of whom were pupils of his own—doffed their caps in respectful greeting. His most intimate friend, a physician known by the high-sounding title of the Herr Consistorialrath Eisenlohr, a stout, breathless little man, with gray hair, keen gray eyes, and a shrewd clever face, was smoking an immense meerschaum in a doorway; he looked up, with a nod and cordial "Guten Tag," as the Professor went by.

At length Herr Bettinger entered a bookeller's shop. After a brief colloquy with the proprietor he issued there, on a pay-bill edition of George Eber's latest novel in his hand. He had one more visit to pay—to a flower-stall, where he bought a bunch of violets, dusty red running between vineyards to Frau Mittnacht's house.

Frau Mittnacht had enjoyed business and social intercourse with the Professor for more than fifteen years. She kept a thriving ladies' school, and her pupils were numerous. In German literature two afternoons every week to the more advanced among her scholars. The lessons were generally succeeded by short periods, devoted to coffee and conversation, in Frau Mittnacht's own sanctum, a little first-floor room overlooking a patch of ground, half vineyard, half garden, with a rough grass plot, a row of walnut-trees, and some apple trees, and a long, moss-covered gravel walk, with an old stone bench and sun dial at the end. The borders were full of vegetables and perennial flowers, mixed together with little regard to effect, cabbages for sauerkraut holding the most conspicuous, and not least honored, place. At the Professor's interview with his hostess there was often present Miss Janet Kirby, a lady with English governess' manners, and who, however, sometimes, on occasions of school-leisure, Miss Kirby would return with the Professor to Abnstadt, and pay a flying visit to his niece, Clara Bettinger, an orphan girl, who till lately had lived with him, and between whom and herself there existed an intimate friendship.

Clara's parents had both died in her early childhood; for many years the rest of her board, clothing, and liberal education had been defrayed from her uncle's slender purse. Now, however, she had reached the age of eighteen years, and had obtained a situation as music-teacher in a school at Geneva. Herr Bettinger, left to his lonely home and to his lessened expenses, began to bethink him, after a shy and silent fashion essentially his own, of enriching his home and improving his purse by taking to himself a wife. Now, at last, that his niece had gone, and that his own literary and scholastic engagements became every day more numerous and lucrative, he could afford to marry.

Realization of this fact was in the Professor's mind as he trudged along, humming the music of a Volkslied; his head was bent, and his hands, according to custom, were behind his back; Eber's novel reposed in one of his capacious pockets, and from between his closely-clasped fingers peeped the bunch of violets.

This was not one of the days appointed for the delivery of his literature lesson at the school; but he happened to be the *Freitag* of the English governess, and the Professor told himself that a congratulatory visit on the occasion was an attention due to Frau Kirby from himself.

Presently, just as he was passing a little farm-house, where a wagon, to which was yoked a pair of sleepy-looking oxen, was standing before the door, Herr Bettinger, lifting his head, and seeing a man advancing, and quickly kicking the loose stones in his path.

"Good-day, Herr Professor!" The young man pulled up in mid-career. Herr Bettinger came to a standstill, too. The new-comer was known to him; he was a certain Max Siegel, a

dark-haired, red-checked damo, in an ill-fitting dress of bright blue silk; his net was a tall, loosely-made frock, very German in type, with a frocked, rather flat face, flaxen hair, and gray eyes. His countenance was an expression of such transparent dissimulation that it could not fail to attract the Professor's attention.

"Is anything the matter, Herr Max?" he asked, good humoredly.

"Well, yes; something is the matter. Are you going to the school-house?"

"I am giving myself that pleasure."

"I started to walk there, too, but I have changed my mind and turned back. There is some disagreeable news which I should be obliged to tell if I saw my aunt, Frau Mittnacht, and I will leave you to the conclusion that it would be easier to write than to tell by word of mouth."

"What is the disagreeable news, if one may ask?" The Professor, impatient with an assumption of frankness, said that he had been late on one or two mornings, but—resuming his onslaught on the stone—"it's hard to lose one's situation for so small a fault, and without a word of warning. Of course I have no redress, and the worst of the matter is that old Freitag won't give me a line of recommendation to another firm. Under the circumstances I don't see where I can find employment. And—dolefully—"employment means for me the necessary means of livelihood."

"Hum—that's bad!" The Professor had lighted his meerschaum; he took it from his mouth, and looked down on the young man, through obscuring smoke. "Things do seem unpleasant, but we must hope for the best," he said with a kindly smile.

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Well, there's just something. As you are going to Frau Mittnacht's, I should be very much obliged if you would break to her the news of my dismissal; she would take it better from you, for whom she has so high a regard, than from me. And you would be very kind, sir, if you would bring me—just what I need, in my vocation, that you have heard old Freitag spoken of as a hard master. He does bear that character, as you must know Herr Professor."

"Yes, I believe that he does. I will lay as much stress as possible upon his harshness, in speaking to the Frau Tante. No doubt she will regret your treatment at his hands. But after all, it is of the Herr Pastor and his school that one thinks most in a case like this."

"The Herr Pastor?" Max's father, minister of a Lutheran church in Abnstadt.

"The young man colored. 'Why! I don't know,' he said, hesitatingly. 'I think that I care most about the opinion in which I am held at the school-house, by—my aunt, and—by—Frau Kirby!'"

Frau Kirby! A new name was introduced into the discussion. The Professor looked up quickly; there was a change upon his face. A swift suspicion entered his mind with a flash; in a moment it found expression through his lips. "Are you by chance engaged to Miss Kirby?" he asked abruptly.

"The young man hesitated. 'No, we are not exactly engaged,' he said, falling back on his old, unimpaired, on a pay-bill edition of George Eber's latest novel in his hand. He had one more visit to pay—to a flower-stall, where he bought a bunch of violets, dusty red running between vineyards to Frau Mittnacht's house."

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It was a lovely afternoon; the sun glancing through the branches of the walnut-tree cast a checkered pattern along the grass. House, garden, and distant landscape were bathed in golden light. "How peaceful it all looks," thought the Professor, but his thoughts tinged with sadness. "Ich gratuliere, Fraulein," he said, presenting his violets to Miss Kirby with a characteristically awkward bow before he turned to salute his hostess. Frau Mittnacht bestowed on him a voluble greeting; she pulled forward a high-backed chair for her niece, the Fraulein Bertha Weiss, who had, she explained, arrived at her house the previous day on a visit from Stuttgart. Then she began a long conversation, or rather a monologue, to which the Professor gave only a divided attention, while his eyes sought the black-robed figure under the walnut-tree.

At length the girl rose; she and her companion retraced their steps slowly toward the house. "I will leave you to tell Frau Mittnacht of Max's misadventure," the Professor said. "You will know better than I what to say to her. And remember, child, Max's friends are not to take the matter to heart. The young fellow's fault is just a bad fact, and will grow smaller with time and experience. I will do my best; for the sake of the girl to whom he is dear I will do my very best."—the Professor's tone was full of quiet meaning—"to be of use to him, with my brother in Heidelberg."

All at once the clear singing of a bird was heard from a neighboring copse. "Listen," cried the Professor, stopping abruptly in his walk; "that note is a nightingale's sure enough. How opportune with time and experience. I will do my best; for the sake of the girl to whom he is dear I will do my very best."—the Professor's tone was full of quiet meaning—"to be of use to him, with my brother in Heidelberg."

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him to mount the staircase alone and to announce himself; she was going to church to see Herr Siegel married, she apologized explained, and was in a hurry. When, his business being satisfactorily completed, the Professor left the house he heard a distant chorus of cheers announcing the departure from the church of the bridal pair, and he lingered in a by-street till the sound had died away. Then, with heavy footsteps, he made his way to Herr Eisenlohr's lodgings. His friend was not at home, but he speedily appeared.

"Excuse my late appearance," said the Herr Consistorialrath, entering with a shining face of welcome. "I had to be present at a wedding and couldn't leave home till late. But I declined going to the party afterward."

"Not on my account, I hope?"

"Oh! to tell the truth, I was glad of an excuse to stay away; wedding parties are not to my taste. By the way, you must know the bridegroom; he is Max Siegel, the Pastor's son, and the wedding is from the house of an old friend of yours, Frau Mittnacht. The bride is Miss Kirby."

"Yes, yes, I know! I have been told," testily interrupted the Professor, with a little gesture which seemed to depreciate further discussion. Was he to hear on all hands of Max and his evicted happiness?

By 3 o'clock Herr Bettinger, having resolutely declined his friend's importunate invitation to remain the night in Abnstadt, was awaiting at the railway station the afternoon train to Heidelberg. His desire now was to leave Abnstadt, and his memories as far as possible behind him.

"Herr Professor!" said a surprised voice. A hand was laid upon his shoulder. Turning, he found himself face to face with Max Siegel. Bride and bridegroom were starting on their wedding tour in the Professor's own train.

Some half-inaudible words of congratulation were stammered out in a voice whose embarrassed tone Max, in his happiness—his was radiantly happy—failed to remark. "You must come and see my wife," said the young man proudly, and he prepared to lead the way to a carriage appropriated to the bridal pair. For a moment his companion lunged back. It would be no light ordeal to meet Janet after this year of absence, and to meet her with assumed equality as Max Siegel's wife. But he mastered his feelings, and, after a moment's hesitation, he followed the young man forward; escape or retreat was alike impossible.

"Please accept my best wishes," he said in a low voice, as he stood, bareheaded, before the open window indicated by Max Siegel.

"Ich danke, sehr."

The blood mounted to the listener's face with a rush. The voice which had responded to his congratulations was not Janet's voice.

"May I introduce," began Max, "the Herr Professor?"

"No introduction is necessary," interrupted the bride's voice, "the Herr Professor and I have met before."

A new, wild hope—a hope which took away his breath, a hope which dazzled and bewildered his powers of perception—was rising up within the Professor's breast. His eyes, he saw, were turned to a pretty, bright face with blue eyes and a crown of golden hair.

"You remember our meeting, Herr Professor, one day last spring at the school-house?"

"Indeed, yes," with a bow—his old awkward bow—and a beaming smile, the Professor's mental vision. An old scene came back to his memory; he saw the school-house garden, in soft evening light, saw Frau Mittnacht waving to him from the open door, saw her niece's pretty face framed by the doorway. Max's wife was Frau Mittnacht's niece, Bertha Weiss.

The engine gave a portentous shout. "Eisenlohr—Fer—tig!" shrieked the guard in the stentorian voice which German officials assume when cultivating. There came a banging of doors and a interchange of farewells between travellers and bystanders. The train steamed out of the station. Professor Bettinger was not among the passengers; he was hurrying, fast as his legs would carry him, along the well-known dusty road leading to Frau Mittnacht's house.

Once again it was twilight in the school-house garden, and once again the Professor and his wife were seated together on the old stone bench by the sundial. His arm was round the girl; her head rested against his shoulder.

The Professor had poured out all the tale of his love, his sorrow, and his jealousy, and wonder of wonders, he had learned from Janet's lips that his jealousy had been unfounded; that his constant, silent love had been constant, silently, and that at first he had spoken in the plying belief that Janet had forsaken by her lover, Max. That illusion was all dispelled. Truth to tell, the girl had never entertained any feeling for Max but one of frank friendship. The young man, in his absorbing belief in his own high qualities as a suitor, had mistaken her friendship for a warmer, tenderer regard. After his return, and after the hurried flight of his bride, he had expected of her an offer of marriage; his rejection of his advances took him by surprise. His pride was hurt as his affection received a shock. At first his astonishment and his chagrin were dimly evident to all his friends; but, in time, consolation came to him, came in the shape of an attraction; he discovered that his countess, Bertha, was not only beautiful, but intelligent, and that she possessed a decided quality of intellect, and that she was, in the English language, of appreciating the fascinations of others. Before many months had passed he urged a new matrimonial suit, and was this time successful. Betrothal was in his case speedily followed by marriage. Within a year of their first meeting Max and Bertha became man and wife.

It was a lovely, peaceful evening; not a breath stirred. A silence of supreme content had fallen upon the Professor. The beauty and the poetry of the lush in which nature was wrapped led him to recognize the utter impotence of words to give expression to his new happiness. He was recalling another spring evening a year ago. Outward circumstances were almost identical with those of to-day. He had been seated then, as now, with Janet by his side on the stone bench; the long shadow of the sundial was creeping now along the path; the afterglow of sunset had illumined house and garden, and a strew of silent vine arched over them. But then, sorrow, silent and strong, as his present happiness—a sorrow which he had believed to be life-long and incurable, had been heavy on his heart. By virtue of identity of outward circumstances the two days would always be connected in his memory; by reason of the inner experiences which he brought they were welded as the poles.

The Professor bent his head lower to meet the loving look of Janet's eyes. A low murmur of his love and of his reverent happiness crossed his lips.

All at once, as if to complete the outward likeness between this evening and

that sorrowful one a year ago, a nightingale began to sing in the copse behind the house.

A sudden memory came to Janet, as to the Professor, with the first notes of the nightingale. "Have you heard the cuckoo yet this spring?" she asked, with a bright little laugh.

"The cuckoo! perch the thought," responded the Professor, in a merry voice, and with mock dramatic gesticulation.

"And do you believe the nightingale now? You had no faith in his song last year; isn't he a true prophet?" The Professor bent his head still lower, and his answer was a kiss.

him to mount the staircase alone and to announce himself; she was going to church to see Herr Siegel married, she apologized explained, and was in a hurry. When, his business being satisfactorily completed, the Professor left the house he heard a distant chorus of cheers announcing the departure from the church of the bridal pair, and he lingered in a by-street till the sound had died away. Then, with heavy footsteps, he made his way to Herr Eisenlohr's lodgings. His friend was not at home, but he speedily appeared.

"Excuse my late appearance," said the Herr Consistorialrath, entering with a shining face of welcome. "I had to be present at a wedding and couldn't leave home till late. But I declined going to the party afterward."

"Not on my account, I hope?"

"Oh! to tell the truth, I was glad of an excuse to stay away; wedding parties are not to my taste. By the way, you must know the bridegroom; he is Max Siegel, the Pastor's son, and the wedding is from the house of an old friend of yours, Frau Mittnacht. The bride is Miss Kirby."

"Yes, yes, I know! I have been told," testily interrupted the Professor, with a little gesture which seemed to depreciate further discussion. Was he to hear on all hands of Max and his evicted happiness?

By 3 o'clock Herr Bettinger, having resolutely declined his friend's importunate invitation to remain the night in Abnstadt, was awaiting at the railway station the afternoon train to Heidelberg. His desire now was to leave Abnstadt, and his memories as far as possible behind him.

"Herr Professor!" said a surprised voice. A hand was laid upon his shoulder. Turning, he found himself face to face with Max Siegel.